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National Child Labor Committee
Incorporated to Promote the Interests of Children
105 EAST 22D STREET
NEW YORK CITY

FARM LABOR *vs.* SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

GERTRUDE FOLKS

> "The average farmer usually brings up everything on the farm more carefully and more successfully than his own children."
>
> *J. Mace Andress.*

Child Labor in Agriculture

Nearly 18,000,000 children in the United States under 15 years of age—60.7 per cent—live in rural communities, *i.e.*, those having a population of less than 2,500. Nearly a million and a half, 10 to 15 years of age, inclusive, are employed in farm work, either upon the home farm or "working out." In other words, about one-tenth of all the children 10 to 15 years old and about three-fourths of this age group who are working are engaged in agriculture. Obviously they are recruited largely from the 18,000,000 country dwellers. This group of workers, however, does not come under the scope of the federal child labor law, and surprisingly little consideration has been given to its needs. The old idea that farm labor is good for children dies hard; outdoor work conjures up visions of fresh air, sunshine and green fields; it is easy to idealize it, to think of the country boy and girl as leading the perfect life of childhood. Dr. J. Mace Andress points out, however, in *Health Education in Rural Schools*, that "contrary to tradition and popular belief country children have been found to be as defective physically and in many cases more defective than city children." But disregarding entirely its physical effects, there is yet another sin for which rural child labor must answer: its interference with school attendance.

Rural Illiteracy

It is well known that the percentage of illiteracy in the country is twice that of cities, one in every ten of the rural population being

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classed as illiterate. It is not so widely advertised, however, that of the 16 states having a percentage of illiteracy greater than that of the United States as a whole, 15 have a foreign population percentage far below 14.7, that of the United States as a whole, the highest per cent in those states being 8.6, and the average 2.9. And even less advertised is the fact that these 15 states include all but one of the 13 states (all southern agricultural states) which have a child labor percentage in excess of the average for the United States as a whole. The parallel is striking and the conclusion obvious. If rural sections, in spite of a small foreign population, have a very large percentage of illiteracy, it is apparent that country children are not being educated; and when we find that in these same regions, there is a large amount of child labor which interferes seriously with school attendance, it is reasonable to conclude that the work of the children is responsible in part, at least, for the lack of schooling. It can not be attributed entirely to the inferiority of rural education, for even the poorest "little red schoolhouse" can train the child to write—the test of literacy.

Investigations by the National Child Labor Committee

These figures are based on the 1910 census, but the results of studies made by the National Child Labor Committee during the last four years to determine the effect of farmwork upon eductio indicate that conditions have not materially changed, and, moreover, can not until adequate compulsory attendance laws are enacted *and enforced*. Investigations were carried on in seven states: North Carolina and Kentucky, our two greatest tobacco growing states; Colorado and Michigan, two of the three states leading in sugar-beet production; Alabama and Oklahoma, two of the largest cotton growing states, and Maryland, leading in strawberry production. Children were engaged, however, not only in the cultivation of the crops mentioned, but in all kinds of general agricultural work, including plowing, planting wheat, threshing, baling hay, filling silos, cultivating potatoes, corn and other vegetables, drying apples, herding cattle, dairying and caring for live stock. In each state representative counties were chosen and the selection of districts and schools for intensive study was made in co-operation with the school authorities. Six hundred and seventy

schools were visited, and attendance data for 37,837 children gathered. The statistical results for all seven states can not be summarized as the investigations in Maryland and in Michigan were of a more general nature than those of the five other states and the figures not comparable. In each state, however, two indisputable facts stand forth: (1) that farmwork interferes seriously with school attendance, (2) that farmwork causes retardation.

Attendance

Farmwork reacts upon school attendance in three ways: (1) it keeps children out of school altogether, (2) it shortens the school term, (3) it causes irregular attendance.

The United States Bureau of Education reports that in 1915 (the last year for which figures are available) there were 145,891 children, 10 to 14 years, not enrolled in any school, public, private or parochial. Since over 60 per cent of this age group live in distinctly rural regions it is fair to assume that a large number of these are country children. In Georgia, for instance, a distinctly agricultural state, there were in 1918, 1,216 white children and 4,579 colored children 10 to 18 years of age who had never attended any school.[1] The State Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Dakota characterizes as "a disgrace to any state" the withdrawal of farm children from school—in North Dakota only 30 per cent finish the 8th grade, and four per cent the 12th grade.[2] The State Superintendent of Virginia writes in a similar vein, "The number of children in Virginia who are now not attending school at all, and the number who are attending school with such irregularity as to make proper training impossible, forms an alarming per cent of the total number of children."[3]

In the studies of the National Child Labor Committee it was impossible to secure data for all those not enrolled in school, but enough instances were followed up to confirm the conclusion reached by the Juvenile Court of Weld County, Colorado, in an investigation of the schools of that county, that the reasons which cause a child to leave school are, on the whole, the same as those which

[1] *Forty-seventh Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1918.*
[2] *Report of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota, 1917-18.*
[3] *Report of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Virginia, 1917-18.*

keep him out part of the time. In Kentucky, while taking school records, the investigators learned of 170 white children attending no school whatever. In Colorado several families were found whose children were not in school and had no intention of going. One family, visited four months after the beginning of school, had six children, the oldest 16, none of whom had enrolled, although the schoolhouse was less than one and one-half miles from their home. The father owned his farm of 76 acres, and had lived there for 20 years; yet the whole family was so poorly educated as to be almost illiterate. In Michigan, fully 15 per cent. of the children of the 133 "beet families" interviewed had never attended school in America. These families are migratory, moving from place to place, often from state to state as the demand for agricultural labor varies. No one is responsible for the attendance of the children, and they evade the compulsory education laws.

The school term in the country is shorter than that in cities. In a comparison of rural and urban statistics made in 1912, the Bureau of Education reported that the average term in urban communities was 46.4 days (over two months) longer than the average for rural communities. The actual difference between the term in city schools and in country schools is even greater, for the above figures include in "rural communities" towns with a population of 2,500 or less, although the school term in such towns approximates that of the cities more nearly than that of the country regions. This condition is usually attributed to the difficulty of raising funds in the country. Another factor enters in, however—the tendency in many rural districts to subordinate education to farm work. The compulsory education law of Georgia, for instance, empowers the city, town and county boards of education to excuse children temporarily from attendance, and expressly authorizes them "to take into consideration the seasons for agricultural labor and the need of such labor in exercising their discretion as to the time for which children in farming districts shall be excused."[1] Schools in Michigan frequently declare "beet vacations" in the late fall. In the cotton-growing sections of Oklahoma the schools open as late as December and even the beginning of January. Summer sessions are sometimes held to make up for the lost time, but as the

[1] *Georgia School Code, 1919, Art. XI, Sec. 171.*

state superintendent points out in his last report, this is unsatisfactory. It frequently means a change in teacher, the weather is hot, attendance small and irregular, and interest at a very low ebb.[1] The same thing is true in the beet-growing regions of Colorado—in one section the schools opened November 29, and closed May 1, a term of only five months (less than the very low minimum required to entitle a state to receive federal aid under the proposed Smith-Towner bill). To shorten the school term in accordance with the requirements of the farm is manifestly unfair—it not only permits children to miss school; it obliges them to.

The most serious effect of farm labor, however, and the one which has been made the special point of the National Child Labor Committee's investigations, is the amount of absence which it causes. Children enter late in the fall, and leave early in the spring; even during the winter months they are absent from time to time to help on the farm.

The State Superintendent of Education of South Carolina reports that during March, April and May attendance is very irregular, and that the same thing is true during the fall months. "In many schools during October and the early part of November and during the months of April and May not half of the children enrolled will be found present any day. . . . When inquiry is made by teachers and other school officers as to the reason for the poor attendance in the early fall and late spring the answer is almost invariably the necessity of gathering and planting the cotton crop."[2]

Wheat raising in North Dakota has the same effect upon school attendance as does cotton raising in the Carolinas. The last report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction stated that an average of at least 20,000 farm children stay out of school each year for a period of 60 days to help in raising wheat and other small grain products.[3] The remedy suggested by the state superintendent—changing the school calendar year from September 1st to June 1st to October 1st to July 1st—would only partially solve the problem of two months absence for farmwork.

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[1] *Seventh Biennial Report, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Oklahoma, 1918.*

[2] *Fifteenth Annual Report, Superintendent of Education, South Carolina, 1918.*

[3] *Fifteenth Biennial Report, Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota, 1918.*

In Colorado the local school authorities of counties in the sugar-beet growing section estimated that 4,841 children between the ages of 6 and 15 miss from two to twenty-two weeks of school, with an average of nine and a half weeks, because of work in the fields. In one school, four rooms were reserved for beet workers, but when the school opened only 30 children enrolled. This number soon dropped to 21, the third month there were 58 children, and the fourth 125. The Juvenile Court of Weld County as the result of their investigation referred to above, concluded that "by far the most of the children who are withdrawn from school to work are found on the farms." In Michigan beet fields similar conditions were found. One-third of the children lost three entire months in the spring term alone, and these are the same children who will enter late in the fall.

The Montana *School Bulletin*, published by the State Department of Public Instruction, discusses at length this same problem in its issue for December, 1919. "Unquestionably the largest proportion of children who are irregular in attendance at school are out to work. It is customary for hundreds of farmers, especially, to keep their children at home for several weeks in the fall and again in the spring when the spring work begins. The most flagrant cases are among sugar-beet workers who are mostly foreigners, but many American parents are using the labor of children in order to run their ranches." Attendance records covering a period of three years were given for eight children from beet-workers' families—these children had missed an average of 242 school days during this period and had attended an average of 258 days—only 86 days a year.

The tobacco industry plays the same havoc in Kentucky. On one farm two boys, 9 and 11 years of age, were helping their father; the school had been in session for only 74 days, and they had already missed 45 and 25 days respectively for farmwork. In another family the 10-year-old son was absent 51 out of 74 days in the first four months of the school year. In another family, very comfortably situated, the 7, 8 and 12-year old girls and the 10-year old boy all worked in the tobacco field instead of attending school. Their father said, "That's the advantage of the tobacco crop—every child is a hand."

In Maryland, the attendance records of 585 children in 15 schools were studied. Only 305, slightly more than one-half of

these children, had entered the first week; 50 more entered the second week, and 64 the third. An effort was made to ascertain the reasons for late entrance, and of the 132 cases in which information was secured, 97 or 73 per cent reported that they stayed out to work, chiefly on farms and in canneries. These children were all between 9 and 15 years of age. A school with a normal enrollment of 33 opened in the fall with nine pupils; another with 52 normally enrolled, had 18 the first week; another had 17 of its usual enrollment of 40. In the spring, when the strawberry season comes, the situation is even worse. One county superintendent received a complaint from a rural teacher that most of her pupils would not take their final examinations because they were out picking strawberries. In another county eight schools had closed two or three weeks ahead of time because most of the children had dropped out to pick berries. Fifty per cent of the children in one school dropped out in March and April; in another (out of a total enrollment of 30) *one girl* was left at the time of the investigation; the rest were all picking berries. In still another school, with an enrollment of 38, sixteen had withdrawn between February 17 and April 16. Again, an effort was made to secure information regarding the reasons for withdrawal, and of 90 cases, 62—nearly 70 per cent—gave farmwork as the only cause.

Attendance records for about 23,000 children were taken in Colorado, Kentucky, Oklahoma, North Carolina and Alabama, showing the number of days missed by each child and the reasons for absence. On the basis of these figures, the children were divided into four classes: those who had been absent at all for farmwork were classed as "farm workers;" those absent for any other reason, such as housework, illness, distance, indifference, etc., were classed as "other absentees;" those who had moved in or out of the district during the school session were classed as "migrants;" those who had been present every day were classed as "daily attendants." Excluding daily attendants and migrants (regarding whom information could not be secured for the entire school term) a total of 20,100 children was left of whom 8,835 were farm-workers. It was found that farm-workers had missed at the time of the investigation an average of 36 days (about seven school weeks); and other absentees had missed only 23 days (about five weeks); furthermore, the farm-workers had been absent 36.2 per cent of the

period the school had been in session at the time the records were taken, as compared with only 24.7 per cent for other absentees. These figures are conservative. In order to have personal interviews with the children and the teacher to determine the cause for absence, it was necessary to visit the schools before the end of the term, and the absence for work in the late spring was not included.

Irregular attendance is a loss not only to the children whose school term is shortened but to the entire group of children in the school. The following statement from the Annual Report of the State Department of Education of South Carolina is applicable to all agricultural communities. "For the first two months in the fall each teacher is constantly adjusting and readjusting his classes to meet the needs of the late comers. The pupils who could make rapid progress because of their full and regular attendance are constantly being retarded because of the earnest efforts of the teacher to promote the progress of the irregular attendants. After four years of close observation of country school conditions the writer feels that it is no exaggeration to say that in the average country school the pupils who attend regularly for the full session do not accomplish more than two-thirds the work they would accomplish on account of the non-attendance of so many children in the early fall and late spring."[1]

The irregularity of the attendance of farm-workers is reflected directly in their scholarship. The State Department of Public Instruction of Michigan has just completed a study of retardation among 25,218 children in rural schools in nine counties. Of these children 29.2 per cent were found to be retarded, and, based on the judgment of the teacher in each case, over 75 per cent of these children were retarded because of frequent change of schools and irregular attendance. These two factors are operative to a high degree among the children of beet-workers' families, and the National Child Labor Committee's study showed that only 28 per cent of these children were in their normal grades; the remaining 72 per cent were retarded. In one school in Maryland, 7.5 per cent of the children were ahead of their normal grade, 42.5 per cent were normal and 50 per cent were retarded. Those ahead had all entered

[1]*Fifteenth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education, South Carolina, 1918.*

the first week in September and had good attendance records. Of those retarded, only one-fourth had entered when the school opened in September, the remainder coming in from three to ten weeks late, and one-half had left before the term had been completed. The Juvenile Court of Weld County, Colorado, reported that of the 2,078 cases of retardation examined, 53.0 per cent of the retardation was attributable to farmwork; and that of the 1,410 retarded pupils who had been absent for more than half of the term, 79.5 per cent of the retardation was due wholly or in part to work in the fields. Their conclusions were: (1) That the greatest single causation of retardation is irregular attendance; (2) that the greatest causation of irregular attendance is the withdrawal of children to work upon the farm.

The Montana *School Bulletin*, referred to above also points out the effect of irregular attendance on retardation:

> "Out of 27 children enrolled last year in one school in a section where the majority of children are kept at home to work during the beet-harvesting season and at other times when farm and home work is heavy, 14 children were from one to three years behind their grades. One family of six children, ages ranging from 6 to 18 years, had in 1913-14 a total absence record of 368 days in a school term of 150 days. With such a record of attendance it is not strange that five out of the six children were from one to four years behind their grades."

An inspector of rural schools in Louisiana reported that the children could not pass the simple tests given them. "A number of fifth-grade pupils could not add, more of them could not multiply; the time required for these operations was on an average more than twice as long as it should be, and the percentage of inaccuracy deplorable, while the situation with reference to skill in the use of punctuation marks parallels that in arithmetic," and the inspector placed first in his explanation of this poor scholarship, the irregularity of attendance in former years. It is also significant that in the one parish (local unit) in which the compulsory attendance law was being rigidly enforced, the records of the pupils were much better than in any other parish visited.[1]

[1] *Field Force Report, November, 1917.*

The studies of the National Child Labor Committee in North Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Colorado, point to the same conclusions. Excluding migrants (for whose retardation change in locality is in part responsible), age and grade records were secured for 16,806 children. On an exceedingly liberal gradation basis—the three-year basis—56.4 per cent of farm-workers 9 to 15 years of age were retarded, as compared with only 34 per cent of all others. Of those retarded, 28.7 per cent of the farm-workers were retarded at least three years as compared with only 20 per cent for non-farm-workers, and only 1.1 per cent of farm-workers were ahead of their grade as compared with 4.6 among non-farm-workers. It is interesting to note that the per cent of retardation steadily increases as the child becomes of an age to work on the farm, rising in the case of farm-workers from 29.2 per cent among 9 year olds to 86.9 per cent among 15 year olds, and from 18.1 to 70 per cent among all others.

Promotion

It is not surprising that farm-workers are frequently "left back," in many cases as a direct result of their absence for work. A child can not be expected to complete in five or six months of irregular attendance a course of study intended for seven or eight months of daily attendance. In Alabama, for instance, two children of 15 years in the fifth grade were not promoted—they had missed 43 and 52 days respectively to work on the farm. In another school a 15-year-old child was found in the fourth grade. This child had missed for farmwork 83 of the 116 days the school had been held, and was not to be promoted. In another school four children (9, 10, 12 and 13 years) were all in the first grade, and were to remain there—they had each been absent 70 days, exactly one-half of the time the school had been in session; the school was to be held three or four weeks longer, but they were going to drop out for farmwork. Another 14-year-old child in the second grade had been present for ten days, and absent 85 for farmwork. In three states, North Carolina, Alabama and Oklahoma, information was secured with regard to the promotion of all children whose attendance record was taken, and it was found

that there were 10 per cent more failures among farm-workers than among all other absentees. (Daily attendants whose record is uniformly high were excluded.)

Influence of Land Tenure

From 30 to 40 per cent of the farms in the North Central States, and from 50 to 65 per cent of the farms in the South, are operated by tenant farmers.[1] During the course of its agricultural studies, the Committee became convinced that the children of this tenant class were not getting a "square deal" and that they suffered to a greater degree the ill effects of farm labor than did the children of families who owned their farms. Consequently in the last three investigations (in Oklahoma, North Carolina and Alabama), wherever possible the home tenure of the child was ascertained. Excluding migrants, this information was secured for 13,069 children of whom 5,410 were from tenants' families. It was found that among tenants' children farm-workers missed 39.1 per cent of the school term, as compared with 31.3 per cent for the farm-workers of owners' families; and that they had missed on the average 42.9 days, as compared with 34.5 days for owners' children. For the entire tenants' children group, an average of of 39.8 days (35.7 per cent of the term) was missed, as compared with 29.0 days (25.8 per cent of the term) for owners' children. Again the effect of irregular attendance is evidenced in retardation; 58.4 per cent of tenants' children were retarded, as compared with 41.1 per cent for owners' children, and 49.5 per cent (nearly one-half) of tenants' children failed to be promoted as compared with 36.1 per cent for owners' children.

The higher percentage of retardation among tenants' children is due, not to mental inferiority, but to their greater amount of absence from school for farmwork. It is to be expected that poverty among tenants will be more acute than among owners, for their labor must not only furnish a living for their own family, but must make the farm yield a profit to its owners. They have to economize to the utmost, and can not afford to hire outside help. Undoubtedly their need is great; whether this explains the absence

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[1] Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States*, page 348.

from school of their children or whether it justifies it will be considered later.

Migrants

The child of the migrant agricultural worker fares even worse. Like the child of the tenant farmer his attendance is irregular and subject to the need for help on the farm. But very often he does not attend at all—it is easier for him to follow the line of least resistance and stay out of school than to make continual readjustments to new surroundings, new methods of instruction and new teachers. Statistics with regard to migrants' children were gathered in three of the investigations (Alabama, North Carolina and Oklahoma). It was impossible to secure information with regard to the absence of the children before they moved into the district, and the records of their attendance while in the district did not indicate a greater percentage of absence than among "farm-workers." There was, however, a striking increase in the amount of retardation—62.7 per cent of migrants 9 to 15 years of age inclusive were retarded, and only .7 per cent ahead of their grade. The education of the child of the habitual migrant is a difficult problem. When the family moves from state to state, the child does not come under the attendance law of any; and even the child whose family migrates from one place to another in the same state is not included in the census, and consequently seldom has the attendance law invoked against him. These children constitute an entire class not reached by our educational laws—a class not small in numbers, nor concentrated in any one scetion. They are found throughout the country—in the cranberry bogs of New Jersey, the beet fields of Michigan and Wisconsin, the canneries of New England and of the Eastern and Southern states, the berry fields of Delaware and Maryland, in general agricultural work in Western and Central New York—practically wherever farmwork, with its seasonal requirements, is carried on. The National Child Labor Committee, a few years ago, made a study of 300 Baltimore families. From May to July they had picked peas and strawberries in the country regions near Baltimore; August to October, they had worked in the tomato and corn factories of Maryland and Delaware, and 100 families had spent the winter, from October to April, in the Southern oyster and shrimp canneries. With the frequent changes, the time

consumed in travel, the inclination to utilize child labor in all of these industries—what chance had the children of these families to secure any schooling whatever?

Conclusion

1. Enforcement of Compulsory Attendance Laws

If the chief argument against the work of children in the fields is its interference with education, it is through the schools that it must be combated. The eradication of child labor in agriculture will not come through prohibitive enactment; it must be incidental to an extension of the school term and a strict enforcement of adequate compulsory attendance laws. That this is feasible, even in regions where farm-work makes the most demands, is demonstrated by the experience of a county superintendent of schools in a beet growing section of Montana. She reported to the state superintendent that she had been successful in keeping the children in school, and explained her method:

> "Last year these people were all visited and written to either by the teachers or myself or both and were told that if they took contracts this year that required the entire family to get out the beets it would be their loss as we would insist on the children being in school and would not hesitate to prosecute. We sent out a few letters and had an article published in both county papers urging every one in the community to constitute himself a committee of one to see that all children were in school and report to my office any that were not. As a result not a child in that district so far has been kept out for beet-work."

This community stands forth as an exception, however, not only in Montana but in the country as a whole, for at present, lenient as the attendance laws are in most states, they are a dead letter in rural districts. Enforcement is usually left in the hands of local authorities, and they are unwilling to prosecute their neighbors. In Louisiana, the rural school supervisors report time and time again that no effort is being made to enforce the compulsory attendance law in the districts visited. In North Carolina, of 144 schools visited, 50 made no provision whatever to keep the children

in school for four months—the period at that time required by law. Parents are indifferent, if not hostile, and can not be suddenly converted to giving up the assistance of their children for what seems to them as vague and impractical an idea as "education." One father frankly stated that his boy was worth $1,000 for work during the beet season, but was nothing but an expense if he went to school.

2. *Economic Value of Education*

There are—as in any child labor field—two classes of families to be considered. There are those who do not need the assistance of their children, but who nevertheless allow and encourage them to stay away from school and work. This class constitutes a large majority. A Colorado family who boasted that they made $10,000 from their farm the preceding year were allowing their two children, 7 and 11 years of age, to work in the beet fields during the school hours. Another family consisting of the father, mother and two girls, 9 and 10 years, worked 40 acres of beets, although they own a good home elsewhere in the state. They board it up for half a year, and live in a shack "in the beets." Another prosperous farmer who owns more than 200 acres of valuable land, nevertheless keeps his 6, 8 and 10-year-old children out of school to work in the beet fields. The school superintendents of three counties in Maryland stated that in their opinion most of the families who withdraw their children from school to work in the fields could easily afford to send them to school for the entire term, and either to get along without extra help or to hire men for the work they now do.

There are some, however, so crushed by poverty that they do actually depend upon the work of the children for the support of the family. This should not be so; it is a short-sighted as well as an unjust policy to cripple the future of children because of present economic necessity. If forced to do without the help of the children either the families would receive other assistance (such as scholarships or mothers' pensions), or the conditions creating the poverty would be ameliorated.

In farming, as in all other industry, education pays, and it is only fair to the child to give him this start for the future. The Missouri College of Agriculture made a study of 656 farms in one

county. Of these 554 were operated by men who had received a district school education, only; the remaining 102 by men who had gone beyond the district school. It was found that the better educated farmers operated 33 per cent more land; they owned four-fifths of the land they operated as compared with three-fifths owned by those with only a district school education; they kept one-sixth more live stock; worked 14 per cent more land per workman; and earned 77 per cent more labor income per year. The report concludes: "While other factors may have played some part in his greater earning capacity, yet from a careful study of the organization of his business, it appears that education must have played a very large part in his greater earning ability." A similar study was made in Indiana among tenant farmers, and the size of the farm, average capital and average income were directly proportional to the amount of education received. Cornell University conducted another investigation of this kind in an up-state New York County. They found that of 1,303 farmers, 1,007 (77 per cent) had received a district school education, only; 210 (12 per cent) a high school education and 16 (one per cent) a college education. Here again the increase in labor income corresponded to the amount of education of the farmer. A comparison was also made between the average labor income returned on stated amounts of capital to farmers with a district school education only and to those who had received more education. In each case the farmer with the poorer education received a smaller return, varying from 48 to 87 per cent of that received by those with more education. This same investigation showed that only 17 per cent of the tenant farmers had received more than a district school education, as compared with 30 per cent of owners.

3. *Reorganization of Rural Schools*

If we are to keep the farm boy and girl in school we must do more than hold out a promise of increased earnings in the future. It is a characteristic of childhood to live in the present, and we must provide a type of education that will make children consciously desire to remain in school because the work interests them. The Educational Committee of The First National Country Life Conference, held in 1919, summarizing the suggestions that

have been made from time to time by various individuals and organizations interested, recommended a readjustment of rural education to include training for health, citizenship, life occupation and leisure. A great impetus to such a revision has been given by the Smith-Hughes Act, passed in 1917, under which federal aid is granted to states for agricultural, industrial and home economics education and for the training of teachers of these subjects. A measure, such as the Smith-Towner bill introduced at the last session of Congress, providing federal aid for general school purposes, will go even further in this direction. Fully as important as federal aid, however, is the consolidation of rural schools and the reorganization of the school system on the county basis. Ellwood P. Cubberley, in his book *Public Education in the United States* points out that educational progress has been confined to city schools, and that this is due to the capable administrative leadership made possible by a centralized organization. He likewise points out that we can not hope for success in our rural schools, nor look for the introduction of progressive features until the district system is abolished.

> "The rural and village schools of most of our States, cut off by law from securing directive oversight from outside the county, and split up into thousands of little unrelated school districts, inspired by no unity of purpose and animated by no modern conception of educational work, have gone along without much change since the days of the sixties. Too often the little rural school stands to-day as a forlorn and shrunken landmark of what used to be an important rural social and educational institution.[1]

The school must again become the center of rural life. Its work should be carried on and supervised by specially trained men and women acquainted with conditions in the country and able to awaken the interest not only of the children but of their families as well. The average rural school teacher to-day is not of this type; frequently she neither understands nor is interested in rural life, and is not prepared to develop the work of the school along lines adapted to its needs. A recent study of the preparation of rural

[1] *Public Education in the U. S.*—Ellwood P. Cubberley, page 466.

school teachers in Missouri showed that from 87 to 90 per cent had not studied any subjects bearing on the economic and social problems of the country school; over 50 per cent had had no courses in rural school methods and management, and 29 per cent had never studied agriculture in their professional preparation, although required to teach it.[1] When the school has taken its rightful place in the community its service will be recognized, and parents, realizing that the training the child receives in school is of far greater value than the limited experience he gets while assisting on the farm, will come to co-operate with educational authorities in enforcing attendance. Farmers' organizations already recognize the value of education and are emphasizing its importance to the farmer, but until the individual farmer also is converted, he must be compelled by law to send his children to school.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "Our civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness and the completeness as well as the prosperity of life in the country." Whether or not country life shall possess these characteristics depends upon the amount and the nature of the education which farm children receive.

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[1] *Sixty-ninth Report of the Public Schools of Missouri, 1918.*

OTHER RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Child Welfare in Kentucky. An Inquiry by the National Child Labor Committee for the Kentucky Child Labor Association and the State Board of Health, under the direction of Edward N. Clopper, Ph.D. Pp. 323. Price, $1.25.

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